



Pharmacist on the Front Lines of a Pandemic - Q&A with Carlene Oleksyn

Carlene Oleksyn is a clinical pharmacist at the Health + Drugs & Travel Clinic Meridian in Stony Plain. She has 25 years of pharmacy experience and is passionate about mentorship and advancing pharmacy practice. Her favourite part of being a pharmacist is engaging patients in improving their quality of life through solving drug related problems.

Q: How did you find yourself needing to prepare for an unexpected pandemic?

A: The pressure in pharmacy practice with COVID is completely different than what we have faced before. My staff are obviously concerned about their own health, and as a manager my top priority is keeping them as healthy and safe as possible while we serve patients. Keeping stress levels reduced and morale positive has been increasingly important. The changes to routine and how we interact with patients as well as how we provide service has added stress to daily tasks. Drug shortages and allocation of crucial medications as well as dealing with patients who are anxious about not having access to essential medications has added strain to the pharmacy team.

Q: How are you finding ways to overcome the communication and patient care barriers?

A: In our practice, we typically spend a lot of time face to face with patients, triaging, care planning and following up on their chronic conditions. We have had to reduce this type of in person care and are following up with and doing wellness checks with patients more by telephone. Personally, I have found that I miss the connection I have with patients when I can be physically close to them. The conveying of care and empathy is much more difficult with distanced body language and a mask covering my face. These changes in how I care for my patients have definitely increased my appreciation for pre-COVID pharmacy practice where I could simply place a hand on the arm of a grieving caregiver or grasp the hands of someone who is suffering with a new diagnosis to bring comfort and support. It is unfortunately our new normal for an indefinite time, the plexi-glass is not coming down anytime soon, so we continue as a team to move forward to provide the best care possible to the Albertans we have always served.